

The Textual and Literary Nature of the Bible

Lesson 4: (Part One)

The Literature of the Bible

Introduction: *The Bible was written over a period of 1400 years by different authors and compilers, some well known and some not so well known. Each one of these people came from different backgrounds, different language, different points of view, vocabulary, writing style, intellectual ability, and spiritual insight. Parts of the OT were written in Palestine, Egypt, and Babylon, and parts of the NT were written in Palestine, Greece, and Rome. As we read the Bible, we need to keep this in mind.*

Old Testament - Literary Genre

Narrative – The most common in the entire Bible – makes up about _____ of the entire Bible.

- A. *Report* – simplest form of narrative. It is a brief self-contained unit usually in *Third Person* about a single event in the past.
 - i. *Judges 1:16-17* – “Now the descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up from the city of palms with the sons of Judah, to the wilderness of Judah, which is in the south of Arad; and they went and lived with the people. Then Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they struck the Canaanites living in Zephath and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah.”
 - ii. *Subject of Reports* – battle reports; construction reports; dream reports; epiphany report (a personal encounter with a divine manifestation); Historical stories 1 Sam. 11:1-11; History: Kings – Chronicles; memoir: usually first person – Ezra and Nehemiah – an account of themselves.
 - iii. Principles for interpretation –
 1. *Should be interpreted as fact and Literal*
 2. *See the report in the context of the Larger subject*
 3. *Determine the subject of the report and then how it contributes to that larger theme. Genesis 28*
- B. *Heroic Narrative* – a series of episodes that focus on the *Life and Exploits* of a hero. These hero’s are put forward as examples, some positive and some negative.
 - i. *Judges* is a collection of heroic narratives

ii. *The Story of Joseph is also one*

iii. Principles for interpretation

1. It is _____ truth.

2. Ask, How does the hero's life model a relationship with God and with other people? - *Life Lesson!*

3. Ask, What _____ does the hero represent?

4. See how the theme of the hero's story intercepts with the *Larger Theme* of its *Context*.

C. *Comedy* – a story whose plot has a *Happy Ending* often because of a dramatic reversal. Characteristics: Disguises, mistaken identity, coincidences (providential coincidence). Will often end with a wedding, feast or a party. Examples... Esther, Ruth and the Joseph story.

i. Principles for interpretation

1. Literal and true.

2. Pay close attention to *Plot* and *Character* development.

3. Discern the *Role* that God plays in the story.

4. Define the stories *Main Theme* and relate it to the larger context.

D. *Farewell Speech* – usually is given in the first person shortly before *Death*. Example... Moses, Jacob

i. Principles for interpretation

1. Determine the *occasion* for the speech

2. Summarize the *Main point*

3. How does that main point fit into the larger context?

E. *Embedded Genres* – A genre that is *Embedded* in a genre. Example... 1 Samuel 10:12 story of Saul before he became king, but right in the middle there is a proverb. Will find: proverbs, riddles, parables, songs.

Law – legal material

I. Types

A. *Casuistic Law* (case law) – very *Specific* and particular. Usually marked by the words, “If...” “Then...” ex: Exodus 21:18, “Now if people have a quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with a fist, and he does not die but is confined to bed,”

- B. *Apodictic Laws* – these are “*Absolute*”, they are unconditional, categorical directives.
 - a. *Prohibition* – Exodus 20:13 “thou shalt not murder”
 - b. *Admonition* – Exodus 20:12 (positive) Honor your father and mother.
 - c. *Participle* – keys in on this phrase, “anyone who...” Exodus 21:12 “Anyone who strikes a person mortally...”
 - d. *Lex Talionis* – (Latin for: law of retaliation) “Eye for an eye...” Exodus 21:23 “If any harm follows...”
- C. *Legal Series* – the Decalogue or Ten commandments; the holiness code (Lev. 19).
- D. *Legal Instruction* – Lev. 6-7
- E. *Deuteronomy* – literally means “*Second Law*”
 - a. Parasis is a _____ of speech – which is to persuade
 - b. Suzerain – *Vassal Treaty* – Treaties that are between the conquering nation with the nation that is been conquered.

How do we interpret these laws?

Principles for interpretation

1. Understand the purpose of OT laws. It was not primarily *Legalism*.
2. Always understand the *Framework* – (Covenant) Exodus 19
3. Categories of laws:
 - a. *Criminal Laws* (offenses against God or others);
 - b. *Civil Laws* (private disputes between individuals);
 - c. *Family Law* (marriage, inheritance, redemption of property);
 - d. *Cultic Law* (all of the religious and sacrificial laws, priesthood, Sabbaths, offerings etc.)
 - e. *Charitable Laws* – for the weak and poor.

All of the OT law applies to the Christian but none of it applies apart from its fulfillment in Christ.

Get the Big Picture:

Each book of the Bible has its own unique purpose and message. Each book has its own place, value and purpose. All speak the counsel of God so it is important that we begin by getting an overview of the whole book before you dive deeper into the details. An overview of the entire book enables you to discover the overall context of the author's message.

1. **Start with prayer** – Since truth must be revealed by the Holy Spirit, it stands to reason that prayer will play an integral part in Bible study.
2. **Read the entire book** – this may take a few times to get the over all picture of the book. The goal is to handle God's Word correctly and to do that you have to see it like a puzzle. First you pick out the corners, then the straight edges as the boundaries and then you fill in the pieces. The picture will come into view once you read the book in its entirety.
3. **Identify the Type of Literature** – The type of literature will determine how you will handle the text. Hebrew poetry (such as the Psalms) is different from the historical books (such as Kings and Chronicles), and the historical books are different from the epistles (such as 1st and 2nd Timothy), both in style and content. History books give background and tell of real events and how God dealt with people, but you don't build doctrine on historical events. Most of the doctrine for the church is contained in the epistles. So, recognition of the type of literature is important. So, as you read through the book, determine which of the following best describes the book you're reading.
 - a. **Historical/Narrative** – The book of Genesis sets forth the history of God's creation from the beginning of time, while the book of Judges records the period of Israel's history when the judges ruled. The book of Acts tells the history of the spread of the gospel and the beginning of the church. This type of literature tells the story of God's interaction with humanity through accounts of events.
 - b. **Biographical** – the book of Luke gives a chronological biography of our Lord Jesus Christ from His genealogy through His resurrection.
 - c. **Poetry** – Uses figurative language, parallelism, and emotion, common in Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon.
 - d. **Wisdom Literature** – The book of Proverbs (of course), is considered wisdom literature, and is a compilation of concise sayings which set forth wisdom and instruction. Proverbs are not to be interpreted as prophecies or doctrines. It does however offer practical proverb-style guidance for life. Ecclesiastes and Job would also fit this type of literature.

- e. **Parables** – Short, allegorical stories told by Jesus to illustrate spiritual truths.
- f. **Prophetic** – There are Major prophets and minor prophets in the Old Testament. They are called “Major Prophets” because of the length and size of the writings. *Examples:* Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. There are also “Minor Prophets” not because they are less important but because of the length of their writings. These books would include: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
- g. **Gospels** – Theological biographies of Jesus Christ, blending narrative and teaching.
- h. **Apocalyptic** – type of writing that uses symbols and visions to reveal hidden truths about judgment and the end of time. Revelation uses rich symbolic language, metaphors and visions to describe spiritual realities and future events. Parts of Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and Joel as well as the book of Revelation and some passages in Mark 13, Matthew 24-25 and 2 Thessalonians 2.
- i. **Epistle (Letter)** – These are formal letters written to churches or individuals in the New Testament to instruct, correct, or encourage. The books of 1st and 2nd Timothy are letters written to an individual. The book of Colossians is also a letter, but it is written to a church. The epistles contain most of the doctrinal teachings for the church.
- j. **Law/Statutory** – Commands and regulations for governing life and worship, dominant in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.
- k. **Combinations** – Some books can be a combination of different types of literature. For example, the book of Daniel is both historical and prophetic. It tells of events past but also predicts future events.

4. Use the 5 W's and an H –

- a. Who – who wrote the book. Who is it written about? Who is the main character?
- b. What – what is the type of literature? Narrative, poetry, proverb, prophetic, wisdom? What is book about? What truth is being spoken?
- c. Where – where is this taking place?
- d. When – when is this event taking place?
- e. How – did things happen in this book? How did it effect the people involved?
- f. Why – why was this event taking place? Why was this book written?

5. Discover the facts about people and events – people and events are usually the most obvious and easiest to identify.

Steps...

- a. **Identify the main characters.** If it is one of Paul's epistles, identify the author, the recipient and the main characters mentioned in the epistle. *For example:* Read through the text and mark in a distinctive way every mention of the author, the recipients, and other people. In a distinctive way, mark every mention of each person or group of people, as well as the pronouns such as, (I, me, my, we, us, our, who, whom, you, they and their) that refer to them.
- b. **As you mark the references, ask the 5 W's and H.** For example: Who is the author? Who are the recipients? Who is this person? What does he tell you about himself? What are his circumstances? Where is he? Recore any references to geographical locations. Turn to a Bible map and locate these places. Why is he there? When in his life is he writing?

These question will give you clues as to the historical setting of the book. Then ask... Why is he writing? Why are they doing this? Why is this being said to them? As you ask these questions, the purpose of the book will start to become obvious. Ask, what does the author talk about the most? What are the people to do or not do? As you ask these questions, the repeated emphasis in the book will show you the theme of the book.

- c. **Make a list of all you learn about the author and the people mentioned.**
6. **Identify the Obvious Events** – people and events are the easiest to see; in fact, events may be more obvious than people. The type of literature, the purpose of the book and the structure of the book can all be determining factors in what is the easiest to see. Ask: What is happening? Where is it happening and when is it happening? Who is involved? What are the consequences of this event?